Saw Himself As Others See Him.

BY FRANKLIN FYLES.

NEW YORK, Dec. 8.—Nat Goodwin sat at the audience's side of the footlights, on Monday night, and saw himself act a new part on the stage. The play was "A Fair Exchange," and the Goodwin in it was Thomas W. Ross, who owed the resemblance of face to nature and of manner to cultivation. The actor, and Henry M. Blossom, jr., the author, had arrived two years ago with "Checkers," and now they endeavored to come again. The theatre was filled by people about as noisy as though they were at a football match, but there was no opposition among the rooters, and if there were others there who didn't wish to see the Ross-Blossom team win they kept silence.

Of course, Ross is more like Goodwin than Goodwin is like Ross; the one is an imitation of the other; yet the newer actor carries off the freshness of a club cub as the older one hasn't been able to these dozen years. The comedy fills an evening with generally amusing chatter by a short dozen of young folks, well dressed if not altogether well-mannered, and put forward as representative society at a New York Country club. In that respect it is a good entertainment. But whoever wants a plot to run clear through every play should quit "A Fair Exchange" at the end of the first act, when it looks as though the second would bring some. It doesn't, nor does the third.

Absence of plot in this Blossom comedy does not mean dullness. Its characters talk smartly and develop themselves into positive types. The best of the witty patter and characterizing details is at the beginning of the play; it is so good, indeed, that it starts the piece at its highest point of excellence, and inevitably it has to toboggan to its finish at the bottom of the decline. The rise of the curtain introduces four dinner-coated chaps at a poker table. The sunlight of morning is peeking through the drawn portieres and the curtained windows. Rich and modish appurtenances of bachellor apartment life surround the card players as they sit under a large circular lamp. One man is limp drunk. Another is shrewdly sober. Two more are just careless enough to be a prey to treachery. A fifth, the hero of the comedy, returns from a telephone in the hallway, loses to his reckless friend, thus foiling the sharper and delivers a morad though simple, sane and flowery lesson. Then the sunshine is let in and the all-nighters breakfast, dress for the forenoon and take care of the one "all-in" fellow.

Presently girls come to the club house to attend a Larchmont boat race with the men, and commonplace situations ensue with uncommonly deft and truthful details. If Mr. Blossom had written two acts and a half more in as good a style as the initial half an act (which is an adaptation of one of his earlier short stories), his play would be a masterpiece in American comedy. The people who rushed "Mrs. Warren's Profession" from the stage for its immorality might well look to this play, which quite casually makes drunkenness and gaming, stock and race betting, the ordinary practices in good society, to be laughed at as weaknesses, but no more than lightly reproved as vices. The second act has, where most authors put in plot, a succession of jests on the condition of a young man's head and stomach after a night's jag. By way of serious interest, it makes him declare to several persons on a club house porch that a young woman of their mutual acquaintance is pursuing him with her attentions. That seems to be customary in his set of gentlemen. Several of the youngsters indicate a desire to reform their drunkenness, but none in this coterie is aware of its greater offense of caddishness. They do wear perfect clothes, but the fine feathers don't make them other than foul birds in dirtying the nests of their clean female mates with slander.

"The death knell of extravaganza has been rung," says a prolific producer of that kind of entertainment, and his dictum is reiterated throughout theatrical New York. What he means, I suppose, is that show girls in show costumes and show scenery won't make a show go as they used to. The utmost in sensuous showiness has been done, again and again, so many times that the public, so it seems to the man quoted, can't be delightfully amazed any more with feminine beauty in audacious exhibition. And I think so, too. These antic girls in lime-lit sights of gayety have become why-of-course and to-be-sure. All that is left for musical farce, comic opera and ballot spectacle, as I see the outlook, depends on such fellows as Bernard, Cohan and the Rogerses. That is to say, there must be funny men to make the audiences laugh, else the voluptousness of the girls and their enclosures won't realize a profit on their cost.

Peter F. Dailey and Richard Carle have come to town with "The Press Agent" and "The Mayor of Tokio" to fight for laughter and dollars under the new conditions described. Each brings a play that has been made over and over since first it was performed elsewhere last season. "The Press Agent" bore the name of "The Filibuster" at its beginning with amateurs in Boston and during its continuance in Chicago. Like some of Richard Harding Davis' exhilarating tales of reasonable adventure, its theme was an ephemeral revolution in a South American republic, and after awhile Mr. Davis was asked to rewrite it, but of course he wouldn't. In the new version that New York gets now, the prose is by Mark Swan and the verses and their tunes are by eleven persons—including Jackson Gouraud.

There is excuse for digression as to Mr. Gouraud's contribution. He was born to affluence, but lost it, and was thwacking a piano for a living when a young Crocker widow, with Crocker millions, came across him. They married and are living happily ever after—thus far, anyway—as indicated by their resplendent occupancy of front seats on opening nights. Jack Gouraud's ballad in "The Press Agent" is entitled "The Hammock;" it employed the principal soprano with a langourous chorus and the performance was halted by calls for the author. But he slid down modestly in his seat till he sat on the middle of his back and stayed so until the danger had passed over. But the rooters for Gouraud did not have things all their own way. A party of Lambs didn't bleat—they howled like wolves—for Gustave Lerker's compositions, a band of vaudeville friends of Ben Jerome made a noise for his songs and the cohorts of half a dozen music publishers took care of the ado for other entries in the competition.

But Mr. Dailey, the Tenderloin's own pet Pete, was getting neither help on the stage nor encouragement in the auditorium. Dailey used to mend and patch his roles at Weber & Fields', and he may do it with this fakir of a showman who, in "The Press Agent," goes to South America with a company of girls and there turns war correspondent; but on the first night the responsibility of a star actor seemed to crush his courage and leave him merely an eighth of a ton of pulp. The rathskeller contingent gave up hope for their favorite jester early in the evening, sitting thereafter in solemn silence, as though they were at his funeral and only once in a while were they stirred to joviality by signs that the corpse wasn't really dead. Of course, the next day's newspapers pounced on him, rended him and left him in pieces, to pull himself together if he could.

Two or three years ago, "The Press Agent," as rewritten and outfitted with new songs might have started blithely to run with its show girls' feet. Now only one of its displays of those girls gets attention. A row of pink hearts appears suddenly in the blackness and into each comes a smiling, roguish face. That is an oddity. Throughout the show we see the owners of those pretty heads in full length activities, but we don't care, except when this new trick of surprise is sprung on us. They march behind the brave baritone while he sings of martial glory and we are bored. They saunter after the tenor while he and the soprano voice the ecstasies of love and we yawn. They toss their skirts, even throw them off, and we remain listless. They wrench their spines and sprain their joints in antics with the clowning comedian in his ditties and we don't lift an eyelid. What can they do that will make Broadway dote again on show girls? If you can answer that question, go to any of the affluent producers of extravaganza and fix your own salary.

The fact that Richard Carle made a tour of half the country before coming here with "The Mayor of Tokio" makes the difference between a probable failure and a sure success. The play was his own to start with and hardly could he have made a worse beginning with some one else's writing. Why, why, why, after all these years of weak, weaker and weakest dilutions of "The Mikado," should an actor of Carle's experience and originality put forth still another Japanese governor terrorized by mandates from his emperor, beset by court conspirators and accompanied by toddling kimona maidens? And I have had to see, or I wouldn't believe, that Carle assigned himself to the role of that worn old wayfarer of farce, the showman stranded with his company in a strange land and there mistaken for a prince and his royal party.

Under such self-chosen disadvantages, Carle makes a whoop and hurrah break into Broadway. How is it? One reason is that he comes to the only one-dollar dramatic theatre in the midst of the twenty-four two-dollar houses. That counts for much in these declining days of extravaganza. Carle's big gain over Dailey at the start, however, is in his having had a plenty of time to practice addition and subtraction, multiplication and division, on the problem and now places the ciphered-out sum total before us. No comedian would dare do in a first performance all the foolish things that Carle does in this piece; they are the laughable residue from only the jester himself knows how much stuff he tried cautiously; so Carle is as amusing now as Dailey may be by and by.

It is too late for a description of "The Mayor of Tokio" to be newsy, but I may tell you that its outfit of women, being strangers every one to Broadway, jogs us with the fact by no means all the feminine humanity fit for show use isn't produced in New York. The chorus exhibits in skin-tight costumes caused something like interest on Monday night, not by their prettiness or their dainty indecorum, but because there wasn't a familiar creature among them. It isn't possible to outstrip former achievements in disclosure, but one array of geishas with their kimonas off, and another of girl-sailors with nothing on that would flap in the stiffest gale except hats and hair, would cause a riot in the days when our grandfathers were grandsons.

What promised to be a fad with the fashionables, a kind of theatrical slumming, proves so transitory as to be hardly more than begun before it is done. It consisted of going in parties to beer-and-smoke music halls on the special nights when amateur talent is permitted to assert itself. This diversion started well with the visit of coachloads from Fifth avenue to an East Side theatre sufficient to fill its four boxes. They arrived late, of course, and as they were belles and beaus directly from a dinner, their costumes amazed the audience and appalled the several amateurs who remained for the ordeal of a debut under such additionally hard conditions—all save one. This was a fellow who seemed immune to stage fright. Most of the candidates for vaudeville are from the ragtag and bob-tail beyond the outermost edges of society, but this fellow was so manifestly a nob that the stage manager expected a lot of fun would come of him; and when the incursion of modish folk occurred the manager counted on the guying of a silly ass a rare feature of the evening. This exceptional novice brought a suit case and asked for a room to dress in. When he came to the wings, ready for his turn, he was well made up for a grotesque Irishman. The Misty Maids company of burlesquers, usually disdainful of these amateur interpolations, assembled at the sides to see what this one would offer in the way of absurdity.

Well, there was a surprise. This amateur gave a song and dance in the manner of a professional. The general audience laughed only when he wanted it to, and applauded for encores. The house manager offered him an engagement at $30 a week, the burlesquers' manager proposed $40 if he would go with the Misty Maids, and then they bid against each other up to $60, which is the top limit with them; but the fellow said he would think it over.

"Neither of us will get him," said one showman to the other; "some Broadway manager will snap him up. Did you notice how the swells in the boxes went wild over him?"

That was because those swells, after the first verse or two, recognized him through his disguise. He was Louis Fitzgerald, who belonged to their own social set. And he never made a second appearance on the professional stage, for he was hurt two days later in a steeplechase with his chums, Reginald Vanderbilt and Harry Paine Whitney, and then, on his way home, was killed by a railway train.

However, it wasn't the sad ending of young Fitzgerald's sportive career that stopped the fad of amateur-nighting. The real reason, as I found by going to one of those affairs last week, was that the novices are too pitiable to be funny. A shabby little chap, scared white, sang a sentimental ballad in a wabbly, unmusical voice; two street urchins gave a crude dance which, no doubt, had been applauded by their sidewalk companions; a frightened girl, in a cheap imitation of a Spanish costume, made a sorry attempt at Carmen in a song and dance; and the first aspirant who deserved the ridicule that he got was a repellant hulk who offered a female impersonation which, manifestly, was his own effeminate self. The uproar of derision drowned his high treble voice and drove him from the stage.

Most pitiful of the hopelessly untalented amateurs were two cripples, a singing violinist who swung in on crutches, and a one-legged dancer. I think that all of us were sorry that they failed to evince any ability, and glad to let them off without abuse. It is no wonder that the fad of going to these tests for amusement didn't last.

RUMMAGE SALE.

By Ladies' Auxiliary society of Temple B'nai Israel, Thursday, Dec. 14, at Loiselle Dancing Academy. (In rear.)

FOR SALE—Brown bread, doughnuts, cookies and mincemeat, Tuesday, Dec. 12, 1905, at Walker's store, by Iliff Ladies' Aid.

ST. PAUL'S BAZAAR.

Ladies' Literary club, Saturday, Dec. 16, day and evening. Fancy work, dolls, aprons, etc., candies and home-made cakes. Tea will be served from the Japanese booth by pretty Japanese girls. Fortune telling by Madame Tafell of London and dancing will be the features of the evening. Admission evenings, 25c. Refreshments.